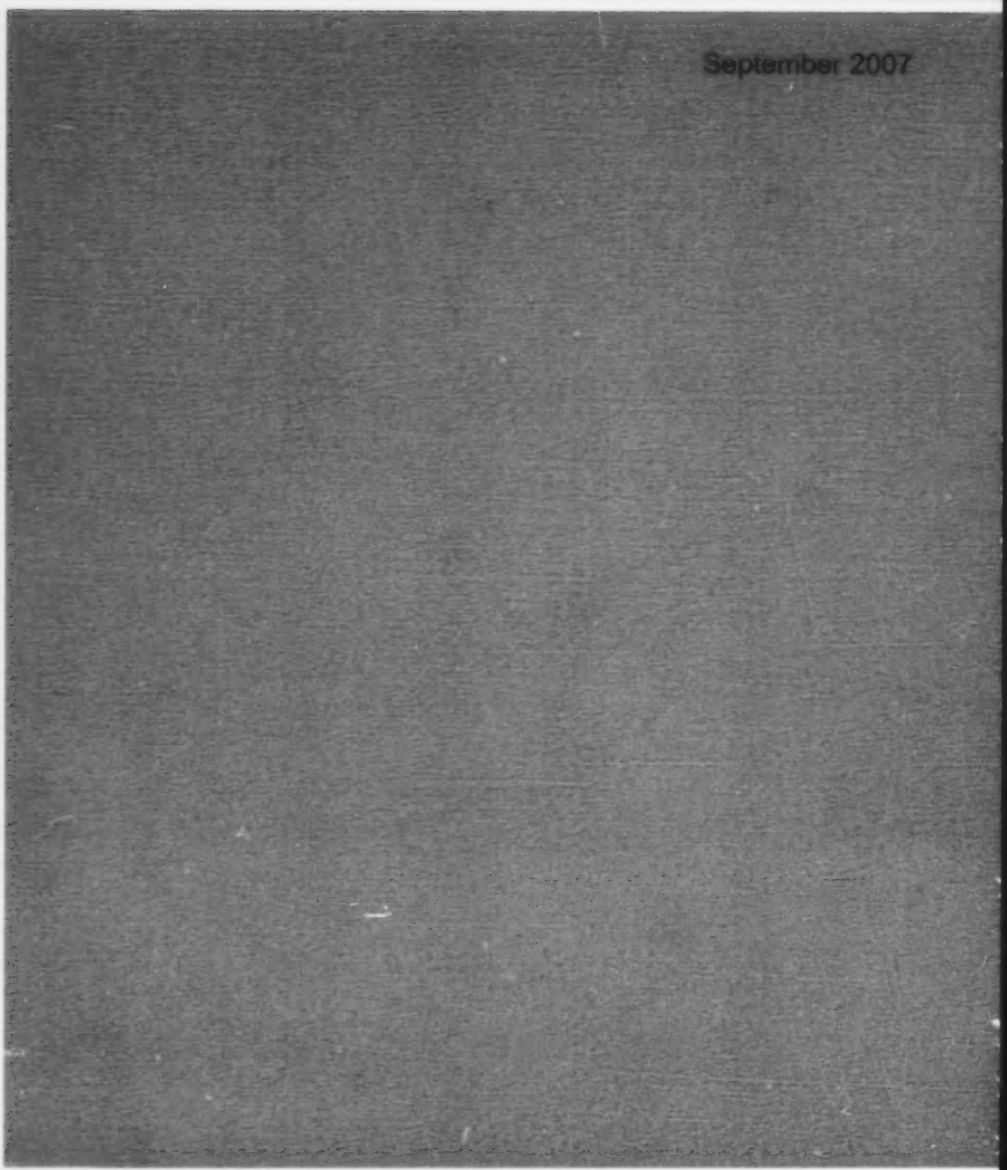
Alcohol, Other Drug and Gambling Problems in Alberta

Services and Perspectives



September 2007

AADAC

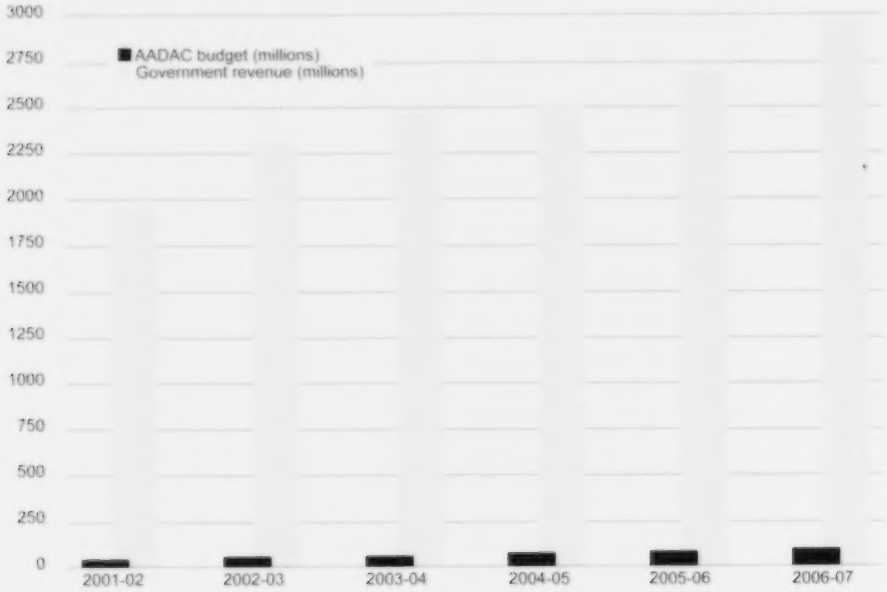
2008-02051/

1. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)

- AADAC is mandated by the *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act* to operate and fund services addressing alcohol, other drug and gambling problems, and to conduct related research.
- Chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obstructive pulmonary disease are, along with injuries, a leading cause of death and disability in Alberta. The most common chronic diseases are linked by a few risk factors, such as unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, tobacco and alcohol use.
- AADAC services play a key role in supporting the health of Albertans. The commission provides addiction treatment, prevention and information services that are available on a local, regional and provincial basis.
  - AADAC and AADAC Funded Services are located in communities across Alberta, from High Level to Medicine Hat, Hinton to Lloydminster, and points in between.
  - AADAC provides information, prevention, assessment, referral and outpatient counselling services through urban clinics and area offices.
  - Shelter, detoxification, short-term residential treatment, and halfway houses are available regionally.
  - Intensive treatment for youth, opioid dependency, and specialized services for Business and Industry are offered through provincial centres.
- In 2006/2007, AADAC provided information and prevention services to more than 150,000 Albertans and treatment services to more than 35,000 people.[1]
- The majority of treatment clients (adults and youth) report using alcohol (86%) and tobacco (78%). More than 50% of clients report using marijuana and 43% report using cocaine.[1]
- Increasingly, clients are using more than one substance.[1]
- Four per cent of clients seek treatment for gambling problems only. An additional 2% seek assistance for gambling combined with alcohol or other drug problems.[1]
- One quarter of AADAC treatment clients report buying lottery/fundraising tickets and a similar percentage play instant win or scratch tickets. VLT play followed by slot machines are the gambling activities that clients are most likely to identify as a concern.[1]
- In 2006/2007, 95% of AADAC treatment clients were satisfied with the services they received and 90% reported they were abstinent or improved following treatment. That is, clients reported they reduced their gambling or use of alcohol or other drugs and made improvements to major life areas such as employment, health and family relationships.[2]

- Budget

  In 2006/2007, AADAC's budget was $94.6 million while revenues from alcohol, tobacco and gambling were more than $2.9 billion. Although the commission's budget has gradually increased over the past few years, it represents a fraction of government revenue from alcohol and tobacco sales and legalized gambling (2.2% in 2001/2002 to 2.4 % in 2003/2004, 2.7% in 2005/2006 and 3.2% in 2006/2007), and less than 1% of the total budget ($12.0 billion in 2007/2008) for the Ministry of Health and Wellness.[2, 3, 4, 5]



2. Trends and issues

Alcohol

- Eighty per cent of Albertans (15 and older) consume alcohol and approximately 3.5% of the population are alcohol dependent.[8, 9]
- Annual per capita consumption of alcohol, at 9.0 litres, is above the national average (7.9 litres). This is the equivalent of about 529 bottles of beer for each Albertan 15 and older.[10]
- Among Alberta youth, 63% of students (grades 7 to 12) consume alcohol and 33% drink at hazardous or harmful levels.[11]
- Since the mid 1990s, there has been an increase in the prevalence of alcohol consumption and in the prevalence of heavy drinking in Alberta.

Tobacco

- Twenty-one per cent of Albertans (15 and older) are current smokers. The prevalence of tobacco use is highest in the young adult population (30%).[12]

- The majority of adult Albertans support government efforts to prevent smoking by youth under 18 years of age: 90% support smoking bans in places where children are allowed, and 80% support tougher penalties for people who sell or give cigarettes to youth.[13]
- Most adult Albertans also support restrictions on tobacco use and advertising: 80% agree smoking should be banned in all workplaces and 65% support banning public displays of cigarettes in retail outlets.[13]

Illicit Drugs

- Fifteen per cent of Albertans (aged 15 and older) use cannabis (marijuana or hashish) and 3% or fewer report using other drugs like cocaine, speed (amphetamines) or heroin. An estimated 1% of Albertans are drug dependent.[8,9]
- The vast majority of Alberta students have never used illicit drugs. Among those students who report using illicit drugs, the most popular drug is cannabis, with 27% reporting use in the year before they were surveyed.[11]
- Nine per cent of Alberta students report using hallucinogens (mescaline, magic mushrooms or psilocybin), 6% use ecstasy, about 4% report using cocaine or other stimulant drugs, 3% use solvents or glue, and 1% report using crystal meth.[11]
- An estimated 28,000 Albertans have, at some time in their lives, used drugs by injection.[14]

Prescription Drugs

- One to two per cent of Alberta students report using prescription drugs such as Ritalin®, tranquillizers or barbiturates.[11]
- In 2005, over 360,000 prescriptions were dispensed for drugs monitored by the Alberta Triplicate Prescription Program. Overall, 86% were for opioid drugs.[15]
- An increasing number of pharmacological treatments are being tested to determine their effectiveness in treating addiction. Examples include ondansetron for alcohol dependence, quetiapine for cocaine, crack and methamphetamine abuse, nalmefene for problem gambling and rimonabant for tobacco cessation.[16]
- Indications are that prescription drug abuse has increased since the 1980s.[17]

Gambling

- Eighty-two per cent of adults gamble, and approximately 5% of Albertans 18 and older experience moderate to severe problems as a result.[18]
- Of Alberta students, 63% gamble and 8% are at risk for or are experiencing gambling problems.[11]

- Gambling opportunities have increased in Alberta and across the country and public concern about this growth is apparent.

3. Consequences of addiction

- Addictions occur within communities across the province. Problems related to substance use and gambling affect individuals and their families, and result in considerable social harm and economic costs.
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs accounts for 21.7% of total mortality in Alberta.[6]
- A national study showed that 54% of federal offenders were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs while committing their crimes and about 38% of inmates were assessed as dependent on alcohol, illicit drugs, or both.[7]
- Problem gambling can lead to serious consequences such as depression and anxiety, substance abuse, loss of employment, financial instability, and criminal involvement. Gambling is a factor in approximately 2% of suicides in Alberta.[19]
- About one-third of Albertans (38%) have experienced harm (such as verbal and physical abuse or family and marital problems) as a result of someone else's drinking. Fewer Albertans report being harmed by their own drinking (10%) or drug use (18%); harm occurs, for example, in the form of physical health problems, negative effects on friendships, financial difficulties and problems with employment or school.[8]
- The estimated cost of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use in Alberta was $4.4 billion in 2002. This amounts to $1,414 per person versus $1,267 per person among Canadians overall. The majority of costs associated with substance abuse in Alberta are productivity losses, heath care costs and law enforcement costs.[6]

4. Looking forward[16, 17]

- The Alberta population is growing and becoming more diverse. Alberta has one of the youngest populations in Canada. Alcohol and drug use tends to be highest in the youth and young adult population.
- The Aboriginal population represents one of the fastest growing and youngest populations in the province. Rates of problem gambling, prescription drug abuse, solvent abuse, and use of alcohol and tobacco are higher in this population than in the general population.
- The number of seniors in Alberta is expected to increase significantly and steadily over the next few years. Addiction concerns for seniors are likely to involve medication use rather than gambling or the use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs.

- Growing social and geographic isolation for some populations (e.g., new immigrants, transient workers, lone-parent families) will increase the reliance on formal social support agencies.
- Lack of affordable housing in Alberta and the increase in the number of people who are homeless are leading to a strain on the addiction treatment system. Overnight shelter services, temporary and transitional homes and stable low-cost housing options are needed for clients who are entering or exiting substance use and gambling treatment programs.
- The use of technology continues to affect all Albertans. Younger generations prefer to seek services and information through the Internet. Many gambling activities are easily adapted to this medium and this is a growing yet unregulated industry in Canada.
- Society is increasingly relying on a variety of drugs (for example, alcohol, minor tranquillizers, and antidepressants) to manage stress in daily life. This trend appears to be more common among the younger generation.

5. AADAC Priorities

Substance use and gambling problems occur at all levels of society and within communities throughout Alberta. They are not contained by geography, social or economic status, ethnicity, gender or age. As the Alberta population becomes larger and more diverse, so do the challenges presented by substance use and problem gambling.

The economic and social costs associated with substance use and gambling in Alberta are significant and rising, and parallel greater demand for AADAC services. The commission will respond to increased demand by continuing to focus on individuals and families, and their needs. Priorities for AADAC include the following:

Ensuring effective and efficient delivery of addiction services that are of high quality and are available to all Albertans · This requires continued research and evaluation, and the application of best practice to improve programming and extend service reach.

Focusing on the delivery of services where the potential gain is greatest · This means expanding programs for youth and enhancing specialized services for Aboriginal people, women, problem gamblers and people with co-existing addiction and mental health problems.

Continuing a long and successful history of working with others, including government ministries, health care providers and other allied professionals · AADAC will strengthen valued partnerships at the local, provincial and national levels to increase overall system coordination and capacity.

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Local services

Alcohol, drug, tobacco and gambling problem services

- information
- prevention
- assessment and referral
- outpatient counselling

Regional services

- shelter
- detox
- residential (short-term)
- halfway houses

Provincial services

- Youth intensive (Edmonton, Calgary)
- Opiate dependency (Edmonton, Calgary)
- Business & Industry Clinic (Grande Prairie)
- Training

AADAC

ALBERTA ALCOHOL AND
DRUG ABUSE COMMISSION

For more information, contact your local AADAC office, call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our website at aadac.com

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